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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001479

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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SUBJECT: GOT CONCERNED FRENCH PROPOSAL COULD STALL EU
ACCESSION

Classified by Polcouns Janice G. Weiner; reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶1. (U) Summary: GOT and UK Embassy contacts say they are concerned about a French-led proposal that would require Turkey -- and perhaps other accession candidates -- to make progress on human rights reforms before opening talks on EU acquis chapters. GOT officials called the proposal a "headache" that could slow Turkey's accession process and heighten the feeling among Turks that the EU is treating them unfairly. EU states are divided over the proposal, and it is not clear how much of it might be enacted. The GOT, meanwhile, has promised to approve 10 pieces of reform legislation by July. En Summary.

Proposal Would Complicate Acquis Process

¶2. (C) Stephen McCormick, econ/pol officer at the UK Embassy, told us March 17 that the UK is concerned that a French proposal to require the GOT to make progress on EU-related human rights reforms before opening certain acquis chapters could impede Turkey's accession negotiations. Under the proposal, the EU would establish benchmarks requiring that Turkey enact legal reforms related to the Copenhagen Criteria before talks could begin on certain acquis chapters. This would mark a departure from past EU practice; traditionally, candidate states proceed on separate tracks toward the Copenhagen Criteria, which set broad standards of human rights and democracy, and the acquis, an 80,000-page document divided into 33 chapters establishing detailed legal/regulatory requirements in numerous fields.

¶3. (C) The European Council recently agreed to open talks with Turkey on the Science and Research acquis chapter. The GOT is preparing to respond with its negotiating position, which will allow the two sides to formally open the first chapter of Turkey's accession talks. The second chapter in the pipeline was Education and Culture, which, like Science and Research, is considered an "easy" chapter because it involves very few acquis requirements. However, McCormick told us the French proposal has stalled the process. The French want to set benchmarks requiring Turkey to enact reforms related to minority-language education before the Education and Culture chapter can be opened. Minority

languages, particularly Kurdish, are highly controversial in Turkey, and the proposal would therefore transform this easy chapter into a political dispute.

EU Sharply Divided

14. (C) McCormick said the EU is sharply divided over the proposal: Germany, Greece, Cyprus, Denmark, and Austria support the French, while the UK, Spain, Sweden, Finland, Poland, and the European Commission are opposed. The European Council's Working Group on Enlargement was unable to resolve the dispute in meetings March 7 and 10. McCormick said compromise will have to be reached at a higher level, possibly at Coreper. He said the UK, often criticized in the EU as "Turkey's advocate," has been letting other states lead the opposition. Unlike in past EU squabbles over Turkey, the UK is not alone this time. Spain has been particularly outspoken in criticizing the proposal. Opponents of the plan argue that it is unfair to combine the Copenhagen Criteria with the *acquis* when this was not done for past candidates.

15. (C) It is not clear yet how much of the French proposal might be enacted. Since the EU must decide by consensus, McCormick said, there will likely be a compromise under which some Copenhagen benchmarks will be attached to the chapters, but not as many as proponents want. Though clearly aimed at Turkey, the proposal would presumably also have to be applied to Croatia and other candidate states. McCormick speculated that if Croatia, which enjoys more support within the EU than Turkey, objects to the idea, the proposal could be watered down.

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GOT: "A Headache, Not A Crisis"

16. (C) FM Gul told reporters March 16 that linking human rights reforms to the *acquis* is "out of the question." Ahmet Dogan and Nuket Tamer, officials at the GOT's Secretariat General for EU Affairs, were less categorical when we discussed the issue with them March 17. They told us they are concerned about the proposal, but said they view it as just one of many examples of EU "double standards" toward Turkey. Dogan called the proposal "a headache, but not a crisis," and averred that the Cyprus issue presents a more serious threat to Turkey's candidacy. He said the GOT fully intends to meet the Copenhagen Criteria, so a decision to link the Criteria to the *acquis* would stall, but not sink, Turkey's candidacy. Nevertheless, Dogan and Tamer agreed, the proposal will add to the feeling among Turks that the EU treats Turkey differently from other candidates. Tamer said many Turks are irritated that the Cyprus issue has become a *de facto* criterion for Turkey's EU candidacy. She said the failure of the EU to alleviate the isolation of the "TRNC" has contributed to a decline in public support for EU membership among Turks, and this latest proposal threatens to further erode that support.

GOT Promises New Reforms

17. (C) While the EU debates the proposal, the GOT and European Commission continue the accession process. A contact at the European Commission's Ankara office told us the Commission should complete the screening of all 33 *acquis* chapters by October. The GOT has also promised progress on the Copenhagen Criteria. The GOT's Reform Monitoring Group -- comprising FM Gul and other leaders -- announced March 15 that Parliament intends to adopt 10 EU-related legal reforms before recessing in July. Pending legislation includes bills that would establish a GOT ombudsman, allow religious

minorities to reclaim some expropriated properties, and eliminate the requirement that minority religious schools hire a Muslim vice principal. The announcement was an apparent response to EU pressure -- a number of EU contacts have told us that Enlargement Commissioner Rehn urged Gul at the March 8 EU Troika meeting to rejuvenate the GOT's stalled human rights reforms. Dogan and Tamer acknowledged to us that the GOT wants Parliament to adopt the reform legislation before the next EU Progress Report on Turkey, expected in October or November.

Comment: A Reflection of European Domestic Politics

18. (C) This proposal appears to reflect widespread doubts within the EU about enlargement in general, and Turkish accession in particular. Given domestic political concerns, few European leaders these days are focused on the strategic benefits of keeping Turkey's EU candidacy on track. Commissioner Rehn is, however, right to point out that the GOT has lost momentum on political reforms since opening accession talks with the EU in October 2005. The GOT can improve its position and help build allies within the EU by following through on its promise of further reform.

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